

THE INDYPENDENT

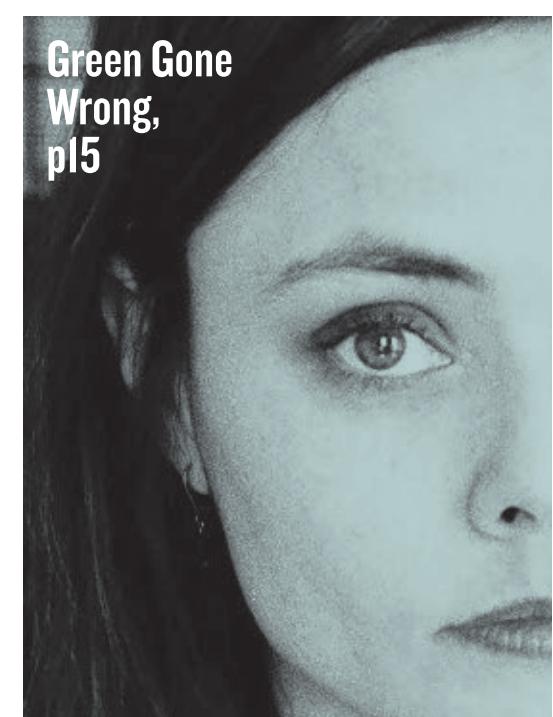
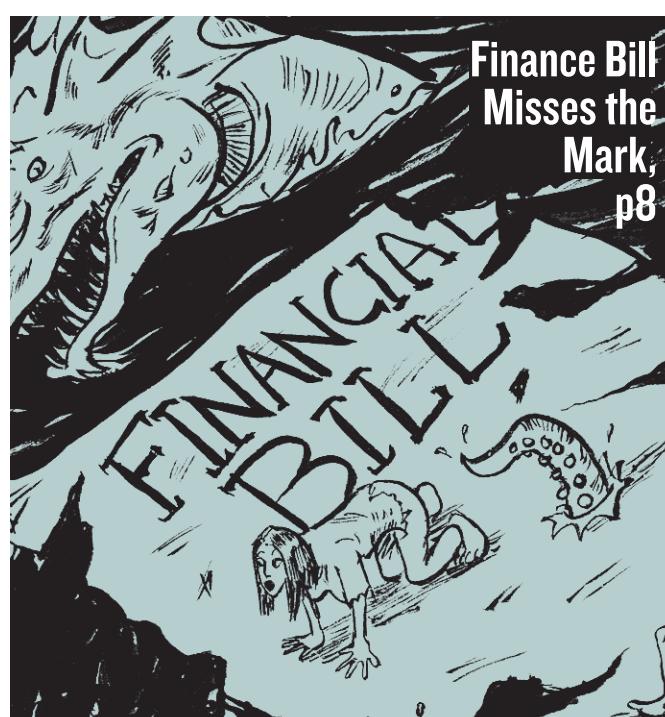
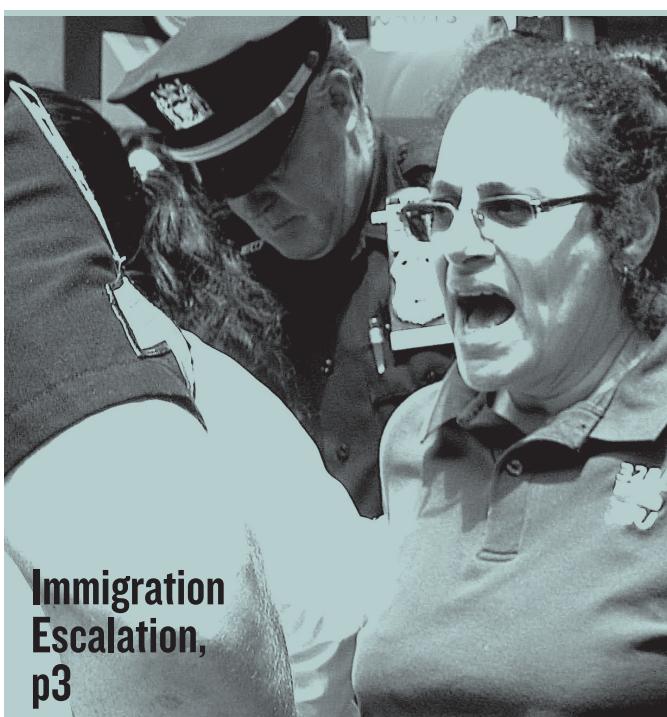
Issue #152, June 2 – 22, 2010
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

Gaza on My Mind

A MIDDLE-AGED MOM'S UNLIKELY JOURNEY FROM APATHY TO ACTION

By Alex Kane, page 6

Palestinian solidarity activist Debbie Mardon, in her home.
PHOTO: THOMAS MARCZEWSKI





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The Indypendent is a New York-based free newspaper published 16 times a year on Wednesdays to our print and online readership of more than 200,000. It is produced by a network of volunteers who report, write, edit, draw, design, take photos, distribute, fundraise and provide website management. Since 2000, more than 650 citizen journalists, artists and media activists have participated in this project. Winner of more than 50 New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Indypendent* is dedicated to empowering people to create a true alternative to the corporate press by encouraging people to produce their own media. The Indypendent is funded by subscriptions, reader donations, grants, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising. We accept submissions that look at news and culture through a critical lens, exploring how systems of power — economic, political and social — affect the lives of people locally and globally. The Indypendent reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

The Indypendent is affiliated with the New York City Independent Media Center, which is part of the global Indymedia movement, an international network that is dedicated to fostering grassroots media production, and to *IndyKids*, a children's newspaper. NYC IMC is an open publishing website where anyone can publish news (nyc.indymedia.org).

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community calendar

PLEASE SEND EVENT ANNOUNCEMENTS TO INDYEVENTS@GMAIL.COM.

JUNE

SUN JUNE 6

1-5:30pm • Sliding scale: \$15-30
WORKSHOP: JOURNALISM 101. Join *Indypendent* editors for a workshop that will teach the basics of news reporting, writing, research and journalism ethics. Email for application and information: indyreporting@gmail.com. 212-904-1282 • indypendent.org

TUE JUNE 8

7:30pm • \$10-\$20 Sliding scale.
ARE SPORTS BORING? AN EVENING OF FORENSIC FISTICUFFS AND VERBAL VIOLENCE. Dave Zirin, sports columnist for *The Nation*, author of *A People's History of Sports in the United States*, defends sports, and debates Arun Gupta, a founding editor of *The Indypendent*, who claims that sports are boring. Proceeds benefit *The Indypendent*. Brecht Forum, 451 West St 212-904-1281 • indypendent.org brechtforum.org

TUE JUNE 8 - SUN JUNE 13

5:30pm, 7:30pm, 12pm, 7pm • \$18
THEATER: *4 1/2 HOURS: ACROSS THE STONES OFFIRE*. This play tells the story of a family coping with the traumas inflicted by mountaintop removal in the Appalachian Mountains. Part of the proceeds benefit the Appalachian Community Fund. Gene Frankel Theater, 24 Bond St 917-338-9541 • tix.866-811-4111 planetconnectionsfestivity.com

WED JUNE 9

7pm • \$15
FILM SCREENING: *THE PEOPLE SPEAK*. This will be the first community film screening of this film, which is based on Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*. A Q&A session with co-producer and co-director Anthony Arnove, spoken word poet Staceyann Chin and others from the film will follow. LGBT Community Center, 208 W 13th St 212-620-7310 • gaycenter.org

6:30-8pm • Free

READING: *GETTING AMERICA BACK TO WORK*. Join Stewart Acuff and Richard Levins for a discussion on how to take democracy into our own hands and change bad public policy controlled by financial elites. Brooklyn College Graduate Center for Worker Education, 25 Broadway, 7th Fl 212-966-4014 • workereducation.org

THU JUNE 10

7pm • Free
READING: *IN OUR CONTROL*. Laura Eldridge will read from her book, *In Our Control: The Complete Guide to Contraceptive Choices for Women*. Eldridge's comprehensive guide includes the history, scientific advances and practical uses of contraceptive methods. Bluestockings, 172 Allen St 212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

FRI JUNE 11

7pm • \$10
EVENT: *PICTURE THE HOMELESS* FUNDRAISING DANCE. Come dance and eat good food to help send members of Picture the Homeless travel to the U.S. Social Forum in Detroit this June. PTH Office, 2427 Morris Ave, Bronx 646-314-6423 • picturethehomeless.org

FRI JUNE 11-SAT JUNE 12

8am-9pm • Free
CONFERENCE: STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES FOR ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN. The National Council for Research on Women and UNIFEM's annual conference will feature scholars and activists covering issues of education, economic security and health. This event is hosted by The Women and Gender Studies Program at Hunter College, CUNY. RSVP online. Hunter College West Building, E 68th St and Lexington Ave 703-236-1535 • unifem-usnc.org

SAT JUNE 12

11am-9pm • Free
FESTIVAL: BROOKLYN PRIDE. The 14th annual parade and festival dedicated to LGBT rights also includes a fundraising fun run and local entertainment. The festival begins at 11 am and parade begins at 7:30 pm on 14th St and Fifth Ave in Park Slope. 14th St/Prospect Park, Bklyn 718-928-3320 • brooklynpride.org

THU JUNE 17

5:30-8:30pm • \$15 Sugg (Plus free drink)
FUNDRAISER: INDYKIDS 5TH BIRTHDAY. This celebration includes a raffle, bake sale and coloring in the *IndyKids* coloring book, *Coloring Outside the Lines*. Come show your support for this radical newspaper for kids ages 8-14. Town Tavern, 134 W 3rd St 212-592-0116 • indykids.net



TUES JUNE 8
DEBATE: ARE SPORTS BORING?
An Evening of Forensic Fisticuffs and Verbal Violence.

Dave Zirin, sports columnist for *The Nation*, debates Arun Gupta, a co-founding editor of *The Indypendent*. Proceeds benefit *The Indypendent* (see listing)

SAT JUNE 19

4-8pm • Free
RALLY: NYC LGBT PRIDE. Performers and speakers will join the stage with LGBT activists on Central Park's SummerStage. This event is open to the public. Rumsey Playfield Central Park, 72nd St and Fifth Ave 212-80-PRIDE • nycpride.org

TUE JUNE 22-SAT JUNE 26

CONFERENCE: U.S. SOCIAL FORUM. The U.S. Social Forum will provide the space for activists from across the globe to gather together to strategize about political projects aimed at improving our world. See websites for more information. Transportation from NYC to Detroit is available. Cobo Hall, 1 Washington Blvd, Detroit, MI 877-515-USSF • USSF2010.org

SUN JUNE 27

10am-2pm • Free
VOLUNTEER: EAST RIVER STEWARDSHIP DAY. Join in for a day of gardening. Tools and gloves provided. Sponsored by Lower East Side Ecology Center and Community Hooked on East River Park. Location TBA. 212-477-4022 • lesecologycenter.org

MON JULE 7

6:30pm • Free
WORKSHOP: ALLIES ORGANIZING AGAINST GENTRIFICATION. Come learn about the connections among economic privilege, gentrification and displacement. Hosted by ShiftNYC. Third Root Community Health Center, 380 Marlborough Rd, Ditmas Park, Bklyn shift.nyc.collective@gmail.com

lyn and the community that opposed the Atlantic Yards development (it was not a "small army" but a large movement) did not just oppose Ratner's project, we advocated for the fair development of the rail yards and found a developer willing to bid for the yards and propose a version of the community plan. That developer, Extell, outbid Ratner for the MTA's rail yards \$150 million to \$50 million. In its infinite wisdom, the MTA chose the low bidder. The "develop" in Develop, Don't Destroy Brooklyn was not rhetoric. We wanted the yards developed, but with the community's input

and vision, not developed in the vision of one single developer through an undemocratic process.

—DANIEL GOLDSTEIN

One part of this story that imploded is obviously the disintegration of ACORN. While Daniel Goldstein criticized ACORN, I think the loss of the community organization is a great loss to the Left.

—ACORN STORY

NYC TO BOLIVIA

Responses to "The Climate Justice Groundswell from Copenhagen to Cochabamba to Cancún" May 12:

New Yorkers from Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice and from Mothers on the Move were major players in Cochabamba. One person even chaired the working group on harmony with nature and ended up presenting the results of four working groups to the heads of state and in the closing ceremony. These are the positions that the Bolivian government — and others — will be moving toward Cancún. You should interview them and hear what they had to say about doing that work there.

—DIANA PEI WU

Continued on page 19

New Yorkers Escalate Demand for Immigration Reform

BY RENÉE FELTZ AND MARY ANNAÏSE HEGLAR

Wearing a clerical collar, a pressed black suit and plastic handcuffs, Bishop Orlando Findlayter climbed with purpose into the back of a New York Police Department truck and took a seat. He was among 37 people arrested May 24 for blocking the intersection in front of 26 Federal Plaza in downtown Manhattan, an act of civil disobedience the demonstrators hope will increase pressure on Congress and President Barack Obama to pass comprehensive immigration reform this year.

"We have written letters, we have marched, we have rallied and we have seen no real action. So it is our intention to step up," Findlayter said before he stepped into the intersection. He represents 140 local Caribbean congregations with undocumented members. "This worked during the civil rights era, and we believe immigration is the civil rights issue of the 21st century."

Next to Findlayter sat several purple-shirted members of the Service Employees International Union Local 32BJ, including Secretary Treasurer Hector Figueroa. "My motivation is very simple," said Figueroa before his arrest. "We have a broken and unjust immigration system that is allowing the exploitation of millions of workers."

With more than 120,000 members nationwide — including 70,000 in New York — 32BJ is the largest property service workers union in the country. Figueroa described how 1,200 unionized janitors in Minneapolis lost their jobs last October because they lacked legal status. Another 475 janitors in San Francisco could be dismissed for similar reasons.

"They should have a mechanism to become legal residents," Figueroa said.

The comprehensive immigration reform outline proposed by Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) includes a path to citizenship. But his proposal takes a "border-first" approach, putting applications for legal residency on hold for eight years until a visa backlog is cleared.

"Focusing on the border security is really denying the reality that there are millions of people here working," said Lenore Freilander, 32BJ vice president.

City Council and state Assembly members were among those arrested in the New York City protests, part of a nationwide wave of civil disobedience that included actions in Los Angeles and Chicago. An estimated 35,000 people marched on May 29 under a broiling sun in Phoenix, Ariz., against a new state law that requires police to request proof of citizenship from suspected undocumented immigrants.

"Arizona shows that if we don't change our immigration system, states are going to take the law into their own hands and come up with measures that will be contrary to our civil liberties," said Figueroa, citing con-



JAILED FOR JUSTICE: NYPD officers prepare to handcuff Lenore Freilander, Service Employees International Union 32BJ vice president, during a May 24 protest for immigration reform in Manhattan. PHOTO: RENÉE FELTZ



spOILED

BE-GONE PETROLEUM: Some 100 people demonstrated May 28 against British Petroleum at a Manhattan gas station on the corner of Houston Street and Lafayette Avenue. During the events, a dozen participants poured chocolate syrup and black food coloring on themselves to express their outrage over the growing environmental disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, while others carried bottles full of dirty water. The NYPD erected a metal barricade around the gas station in advance of the demonstration, effectively shutting down the facility. The action was organized by CODEPINK NYC, Freedom Glory Project and Time's Up! NYC.

PHOTO: LEE WELLS



By STEVEN WISHNIA

After more than a year of pressure from tenants urging the repeal of the state's vacancy-decontrol law, Gov. David Paterson has finally weighed in. In a bill announced May 26, he proposed raising the threshold for taking apartments out of rent controls from \$2,000 a month to \$3,000.

"We believe we've crafted a balanced measure that provides stability and certainty, tightens protections for tenants, will stem the loss of rent-regulated units and preserve affordable housing, and that has a legitimate chance of being passed in the legislature," said State Housing Commissioner Brian Lawlor.

"It's an outrage," responded Michael McKee, head of the Housing Here and Now tenant-rights coalition. "He [Paterson] has gone over to the dark side. He's screwing everybody who used to be part of his base."

"This bill will do nothing to slow down the loss of affordable rent-regulated housing," Housing Here and Now said in a statement May 26. "Nothing short of full repeal of vacancy decontrol, and deregulation of the 300,000 apartments we have lost in the last 16 years, will do."

The bill, which would extend the state's rent-regulation laws from 2011 to 2019, has three main provisions:

- Vacant apartments could still be decontrolled if the legal rent is \$3,000 or more. That threshold would go up every year according to the increases set by the city Rent Guidelines Board. (Apartments already decontrolled would not be regulated.)

- It would establish some new protections against illegal overcharges. Owners taking apartments out of rent regulation would be required to file an "exit notice" with the state Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) and to tell incoming tenants that they can file an application with DHCR to make certain that the apartment was legally decontrolled.

- Landlords could decontrol apartments that received J-51 tax benefits once they reached the \$3,000 threshold.

"This is what everyone in the industry thought the law was," Lawlor said in a telephone press conference May 26, referring to the provisions regarding J-51 benefits. The state Court of Appeals decision in *Roberts*

v. Tishman Speyer last October "completely threw the situation into disarray," he stated; that ruling held that the owners of Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village could not take those tax breaks and then deregulate apartments in those buildings. The city's law, the court said, was clear: J-51 benefits are specifically intended to help landlords renovate rent-stabilized buildings, so buildings receiving that money must remain under regulation.

About 40,000 apartments get J-51 benefits, Lawlor said. The proposed law would not overturn the *Roberts* decision for Stuy Town/PCV, he says. Instead, it would clarify the law: Apartments that were already rent-stabilized when they got J-51 benefits could still be deregulated, but those that became rent-stabilized only when they received J-51 benefits could not be.

That provision is likely intended to protect owners from lawsuits challenging deregulation in other J-51 buildings. State Sen. Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan) called it "completely unacceptable." Letting apartments with J-51 designation be deregulated, she says, would overturn both the court decision and the intent of the law, just so landlords can get out of legal obligations.

"Why are we allowing taxpayers' dollars to be given away if there's no quid pro quo for the public good?" she asked.

Krueger added that the vacancy-decontrol changes do "not go nearly far enough." Repeal-

ing vacancy decontrol has been the top issue on the tenant movement's legislative agenda since Democrats won control of the state Senate in 2008. It passed the State Assembly in 2009, but was stalled in the Senate when Housing Committee Chair Pedro Espada switched to the Republican Party the day before a scheduled vote last June.

Under vacancy decontrol, landlords can easily get away with charging illegally high rents, McKee explained. "Ninety percent of landlords will just stop registering the apartment and tell tenants that it's not rent-stabilized. People don't file complaints because they don't know they have a right to file, and because they assume the system is rigged against them," McKee said.

Lawlor defends the state's record on enforcing the law against rent overcharges. In the last three years, the state DHCR has issued 2,100 orders requiring landlords to pay back rent and damages.

However, according to agency figures obtained by Housing Here and Now, only about 2,000 tenants a year file overcharge complaints.

McKee said tenant groups will continue pushing for full repeal of vacancy decontrol. Senate Majority Leader John Sampson, he said, can "get 32 votes if he really wants it."

That kind of fraud happens even when the apartment rents for under \$2,000, adds Mario Mazzoni of the Metropolitan Council on Housing.

TEACHING UNDER ASSAULT

Two visions of education clash as Bloomberg prepares to lay off 6,400 teachers

BY NORM SCOTT



DANIEL FISHEL

After teaching elementary education for 27 years at PS 147 in Williamsburg, I was offered a technology job at the district level in 1998. When my new boss informed my principal, she practically leapt for joy. "My car was stolen today," she said, "but this makes up for it."

I had been the teachers union chapter leader at the school for the previous three years, and for 20 years I had insisted on some degree of academic freedom so my colleagues and I could teach our students in the ways that best met their needs. This included speaking out openly against our principal's "test prep all the time" policy — often to little avail. This principal's favorite teachers were often the least respected and least effective in many ways. These teachers knew where the bread meets the butter — support the principal in every way, no matter how bad the policy, and try to undermine the union within the school. There was no question, that given a choice, my principal would have chosen loyalty over competence.

This kind of favoritism and arbitrary leadership has, if anything, grown worse in the intervening years since Mayor Michael Bloomberg and his handpicked Schools Chancellor Joel Klein took control of the school system in 2002. With 6,400 city public school teachers facing layoffs this year due to proposed budget cuts, it is important to keep this in mind when self-styled education reformers call for junking seniority as the basis for administering layoffs. At stake is not just the principle of seniority, but also two different visions of teaching.

TWO VISIONS

The educational model public schools have operated under for the past half-century envisions teaching as a career path for highly trained professionals. Veteran teachers cost more and will someday receive pensions. But they also develop their skills over time, are in a position to mentor younger teachers and are able to anchor a school community across generations.

At PS 147, I not only taught the younger siblings of former students and came to know their parents, but later in my career was teaching the children of former students. No metric can measure the value of these bonds; they are real and make a difference in a teacher's ability to understand and respond to the needs of the students, families and communities they serve.

The vision espoused by Bloomberg and Klein and others like them across the country is that of a nonunionized, Peace Corps-type teaching model in which young, bright

(and mostly white) college graduates are recruited through programs like Teach For America and thrown into inner-city schools with little training, often forced to work long hours under grueling conditions with minimal rights. Quickly burned out by their assembly line-like conditions, many of these young teachers move onto other pursuits (like graduate school) within a few years. It's education on the cheap dressed up in idealistic garb.

Klein has carefully laid the groundwork for this kind of system in New York City during the past eight years while running circles around the hapless leadership of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the union that represents 87,000 New York City public school teachers.

Soon after being appointed by Bloomberg

ness, principals face a singular mandate: increase "outputs" (i.e., standardized test scores) while making do with fewer "inputs" (i.e., funding). Eliminating experienced teachers saves money but at the expense of the expertise and institutional memory carried by long-time educators. This approach is also about centralizing power; veteran teachers are more likely to buck the test-prep script and rely on their professional judgment about how best to educate their students. They are also more likely to defend the rights of their colleagues to do the same. Given the incentives that currently exist to purge veteran teachers, it is naïve to believe that most principals have a nobler agenda of keeping the best teachers while rooting out the lazy and the burned-out ones.

Nonetheless, in his latest attacks, Klein

Given the incentives that currently exist to purge veteran teachers, it is naïve to believe that most principals have a nobler agenda of keeping the best teachers while rooting out the lazy and the burned-out ones who abuse their tenured status.

in 2002, Klein began arguing for the right to loosen seniority protections so he could transfer teachers anywhere he wanted, saying he wanted to keep experienced teachers in poorer performing schools. Now that argument has been reversed. It appears his intention all along was to manipulate the situation with an ultimate goal of getting rid of the highest-paid teachers.

Klein continued to undermine seniority protections, with UFT complicity, in the 2005 contract, which created an open-market system that allowed principals to fill teaching openings on a non-seniority basis. Klein then instituted a funding formula for schools that penalized those with higher-salaried teachers (the difference between a first-year teacher and a 23-year teacher is more than \$50,000). When schools determined to be "failing" were closed and veteran teachers lost their positions, many could not get rehired and were turned into full-time substitutes.

INCOMPETENT PRINCIPALS

For as long as I can remember, there have been incompetent school principals who rule over their fiefdoms like petty despots. But the problem has become increasingly severe in the past eight years as Klein installed more principals who are guided by corporate managerial ideology but know little about education.

Expected to run their schools like a busi-

calls for eliminating seniority as a criterion in executing required layoffs and measuring teachers' abilities using their student's standardized test scores and other purportedly objective standards. While he has not won approval for this proposal, look for attempts to move the New York Legislature to change laws on teacher seniority.

The current battle over seniority goes to the heart of the national attack on teachers by proponents of corporate-style education reform, who have been getting support from many traditional teacher allies within the Democratic Party. An all-out push is under way to place urban public school systems in the hands of private interests under the guise of employing market-based forces like competition and choice. To these education reformers, the very existence of union labor rules constitutes an infringement of free-market forces. Destroying seniority and tenure protection — pillars of teacher unionism — is a necessary component of the plan.

This anti-union bias is a major motive underlying the current craze for privately run charter schools that are being sold to the public as the panacea for all educational problems. It is also one of the reasons why large corporate, financial and other business interests have poured enormous amounts of funding into charter schools, which are still mostly supported with public money — money that is drained from the unionized public schools. The end game: privatize massive chunks of public school systems in favor of schools with nonunionized teachers and break teachers' unions as a force in urban education.

Before this sacking of experienced teachers is carried out here in New York City and elsewhere, we as a society should think carefully about what sort of educational future we want for our children. The decisions made around this issue in the coming months and years will have an enormous impact for decades.

Norm Scott worked in the New York City public school system from 1967 to 2002. He publishes commentary about current issues in New York City public education at ednotesonline.blogspot.com.

RACE TO NOWHERE

The New York Legislature voted May 28 to more than double the number of charter schools in the state over the next four years from 200 to 460. New York City saw its charter cap lifted from 100 schools to 214. The vote followed months of wrangling over the future of charter schools, which receive public funds but are privately managed.

Under the agreement, charter schools will be publicly audited for the first time and no new charters will be granted to for-profit operators. In a setback for charter public school advocates, charter schools will still be able to be co-located into existing public schools without the approval of parents, something that has roiled neighborhoods across the city in

recent years. The legislation only calls for creating advisory councils at schools that share a building to monitor space usage and conflict.

Supporters of the legislation hope that it will improve New York's chance of qualifying for as much as \$700 in federal aid under the Race to the Top program. However, critics say Race to the Top money will do little to help cash-strapped school districts but will instead enshrine a number of new wasteful programs including additional rounds of standardized testing.

—JOHN TARLETON



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MARRIED TO PROTEST: Debbie Mardon (left) and her Palestinian-American husband, Mahmoud Bitar (center), are often at demonstrations together, like this May 31 demonstration in Times Square against a deadly Israeli raid on ships filled with aid for the people of Gaza.

PHOTO: ELLEN DAVIDSON

PALESTINE SOLIDARITY

One Woman's Journey

BY ALEX KANE

**DROPPING BILL
O'REILLY FOR NOAM
CHOMSKY, DEBBIE
MARDON LEADS HER
FAMILY'S POLITICAL
TRANSFORMATION.**

Last New Year's Eve, Debbie Mardon did not celebrate with noise makers or confetti — instead, she headed to Cairo's main square to participate in the Gaza Freedom March with her daughter Jenna Bitar, 18, and son Joel, 23.

Amid police violence aimed at protesters and Egyptian security forces blockading them inside their hotel, Debbie, 55, a native New Yorker, said that protesting in Cairo "was the scariest thing I've ever done in my life."

It was an unlikely place to be for a previously apolitical mother who voted for George W. Bush and as recently as three years ago relied on rightwing radio hosts Sean Hannity and Rush Limbaugh to help her make sense of the world.

More than 1,300 activists from 43 countries traveled to Cairo to take part in the Gaza Freedom March, a demonstration aimed at bringing attention to the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Since 2006, after the Islamist movement Hamas won democratic elections, Israel and Egypt have completely blockaded this besieged coastal strip on the Mediterranean, only allowing in basic humanitarian aid. The situation worsened in December, 2008, when Israel invaded Gaza, eventually killing about 1,400 Palestinians, the majority of them civilians.

Debbie and her children, like the rest of the activists who participated in the Gaza Freedom March, were outraged at what many have labeled the "Gaza massacre."

The three-year journey for Debbie, her husband Mahmoud and their two children from political indifference to passionate involvement in the Palestine solidarity community has brought them closer together as a family, and they now regularly attend demonstrations together.

For Debbie, things came to a head during the attack on Gaza in the winter of 2008-09. It was a personally harrowing time — both she and Mahmoud had lost their mothers

and a good friend had been placed in a nursing home, and Debbie decided it was time to find out more about what was happening in Palestine.

She started attending talks and lectures about Palestine, and one in particular, featuring Norwegian doctor Mads Gilbert at Columbia University, left an indelible impression.

"It was jaw-dropping. He showed us photos of dying and maimed children, children burned from the white phosphorous, and the photos had me in tears. Then he said, this suffering is not caused by a natural disaster, it is political, it is foreign policy and you can no longer be silent while your government supports this. After that I made an effort to find out how I could get involved," Debbie said.

NATIVE NEW YORKER

Debbie, tall, outgoing and buoyant, can be found in her fifth floor walk-up apartment on the Upper East Side. She is welcoming and quick to offer dinner and drinks. The apartment she shares with her Palestinian-American husband and two kids is snug, with enough room to feel comfortable but not enough to avoid each other if everyone's home.

There are pictures of Jenna in a Halloween costume in the kitchen, plants around the living room, a comfortable couch and a black cat named Blossom. Their bookshelf is filled with the works of Noam Chomsky, Chris Hedges and Norman Finkelstein and flyers advertising leftist events in the city are posted near the refrigerator.

Three years ago, Debbie would have been on the couch watching Bill O'Reilly and reading conservative *Wall Street Journal* columnist Peggy Noonan.

Debbie took comfort in Fox News' slant on the world. "I wanted to know that someone out there was watching so our country wasn't torn apart by unpatriotic voices," she said.

But for most of Debbie's life, politics were never important. One of four siblings, she

grew up in the Bedford Park neighborhood in the Bronx and attended Walton High School. Her mother was a homemaker and her father worked as an electrician.

Debbie went to the City College School of Architecture, where she first met her future husband, Mahmoud Bitar, a Palestinian-American, at the end of their sophomore year.

Mahmoud was taken with Debbie starting with the first time they met.

"We talked under a tree in the rain on campus. I saw her heart and fell in love," Mahmoud said.

When Debbie first met Mahmoud, she did not understand what it meant to be someone from Palestine. Mahmoud was uncomfortable with his heritage, and he let people, including Debbie when they started dating, think he was Jewish or Italian. Debbie recalls how "people said things to him like, 'You're not a Palestinian, you're too nice.'"

Born in the Old City of Jerusalem in 1958, Mahmoud was brought up immersed in the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He lived in Jericho, a city in the West Bank, for the first ten years of his life after his family moved there because his father had set up a station in Jericho selling fruits and vegetables. In 1967, when the Six-Day War broke out, Mahmoud and his family returned to Jerusalem after Israeli bombs killed three of his relatives.

As soon as Mahmoud and his two brothers were college-aged, their parents sent them to the United States. Mahmoud, now a U.S. citizen, arrived in the United States in 1977 on a student visa.

After getting married in 1980 and graduating from college three years later, Debbie and Mahmoud had their first child, Joel, in 1986, and their second, Jenna, in 1992. Debbie worked part-time at an architectural firm while raising their children.

Mahmoud, who has curly hair and seems to always have a twinkle in his eye, speaks in calm and at times airy tones, a contrast to Debbie's more forward and pointed way of talking. He currently works as an architect for New York City's Administration for Children's Services.

For most of their marriage and while raising Jenna and Joel, Mahmoud rarely talked about his childhood in Palestine.

"I never got a greater picture, it was just bad things were happening to the Palestinians, or at least my family that was Palestinian," Jenna said. "I visited there before I knew what was going on, for three weeks, with my grandparents when they were alive. I lived the life they lived for a bit, saw the checkpoints, but I didn't understand."

THE 9/11 FACTOR

The September 11, 2001, attacks jolted Debbie's political perspective, and made Mahmoud more nervous about his background as a Palestinian, especially as thousands of Middle Eastern men were profiled and arrested throughout New York City.

Debbie had just dropped Jenna off at school when she returned home and watched the second plane hit the World Trade Center on television.

Debbie turned to Fox News for clarity.

"That was the first time I started learning about foreign policy, and why someone would attack us," Debbie said.

But Debbie and Mahmoud rarely discussed post-9/11 politics.

"We didn't discuss it, I just listened. Debbie's a leader by nature, so she always led with the remote control," Mahmoud recalls. "She had the remote control with her so she would pick the information, and I would retreat when I had really had enough of it."

Joel was apathetic about politics at the time, and Jenna stayed by her mother's side as she watched Fox.

Debbie's close attention to post-9/11 politics did not last for too long after the Iraq War started in 2003, though, as her trust

in the government slipped when the United States did not find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

However, a series of events in 2008 would bring politics back into the family's life in a prominent way, and they have not turned back since.

CHURCH, GAZA AND A TRANSFORMATION

Debbie's family started attending the Redeemer Presbyterian Church almost 20 years ago. While they were initially drawn to the church, which met at Hunter College, by a smart and interesting pastor, over the years the congregation became a second family for all of them.

However, they were forced to leave this community in March 2008 after Mahmoud, who worked at the church on Sundays, was accused of stealing a CD of a church sermon. He was arrested by a City University of New York security guard and charged with assaulting an officer, resisting arrest and misdemeanor theft—charges that Debbie and her family say were ridiculous and were later dropped.

"It was a small thing in the larger world, but it happened to us," Debbie recalls. "I thought that we would be immune to all this, and that the community we were a part of would care about truth and care about justice being served, but they didn't care about either of those things. It opened my eyes to greater injustices. I used to think that people who went to jail were probably guilty. But now, I thought, 'Oh my goodness! There are all these people in jail that are probably innocent.' Michael could've gone to jail, but he had a private lawyer. What happens if you're poor?"

Nine months later, on Dec. 27, 2008, Israel invaded the Gaza Strip, beginning what would be a devastating assault.

"It was during Gaza that we started to awaken," said Joel, who at the time was first foraying into politics by joining an antiwar organization at Hunter College and reading books about U.S. foreign policy and the Israel-Palestine conflict. "Killing civilians indiscriminately with U.S. weapons, paid for with our tax money, seemed to be so hideously wrong."

During what Amnesty International called "22 days of death and destruction," Debbie could not avoid the Gaza conflict, especially because Mahmoud's brother Farid, who was glued to Al Jazeera's coverage of the assault, was emotionally devastated.

Joel, who was reading books like Noam Chomsky's *The Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel and the Palestinians*, also started to talk with Debbie about the detrimental impact of U.S. foreign policy on Palestine.

After those 22 days were over, Debbie started going to lectures and protests about the conflict and soon found herself enmeshed in the world of Palestine solidarity activism. Although described as the "leader" of the household, she was the last person to finally call herself an activist.

The assault on Gaza also made Mahmoud become more engaged with the Palestine solidarity movement.

"It's a natural conclusion to what happened in Gaza," Mahmoud says. "Our breath is being taken out of us. I felt an ur-

gency to start having a voice."

In the last two years, the household has been transformed. Jenna describes how sometimes, before she goes to sleep, Debbie will run into her room and "just read me books out loud," including passages from the work of Chris Hedges and Michael Parenti. "She'll come and say, 'I have to read you this passage, it's so good' and it'll be something sad and depressing," Jenna says, laughing.

These days, it is nearly impossible to miss Debbie and members of her family at activist events related to Palestine. The actions they frequent include protesting with Adalah-NY: The New York Campaign for the Boycott of Israel, in the group's campaign against Lev Leviev. An Israeli billionaire who owns a jewelry store in Manhattan, Leviev is involved with companies that invest in and construct illegal Jewish-only settlements on Palestinian land.

"She's really knowledgeable. She has really educated herself on Palestine," says Helen Schiff, a New York-based activist who has become close friends with Debbie over the past two years. "She has a voracious mind, and she's very, very smart."

Continued on page 19

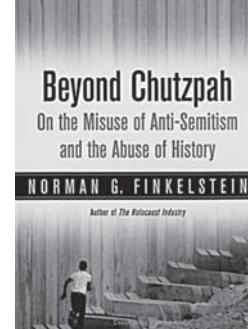
An Activist's Bookshelf

Here are three books that Debbie Mardon found especially helpful when she sought to learn more about the root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy

By John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007)

This book describes how the pro-Israel lobby enforces overwhelming U.S. support for Israel by rewarding or punishing politicians based on their position on Israel.



Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History

By Norman G. Finkelstein (University of California Press, 2005)

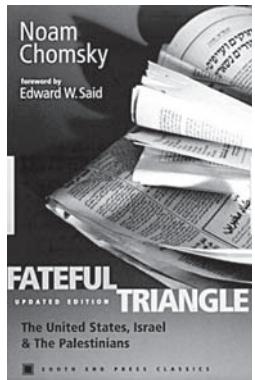
Finkelstein argues that those that claim

the situation is too complex to understand have distorted the reality of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Much of the book is aimed at debunking Harvard professor Alan Dershowitz's book *The Case for Israel*.

The Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel and the Palestinians

By Noam Chomsky (South End Press, 1999)

Chomsky examines the harmful impact that U.S. support of Israel has on Palestinians. Israel, Chomsky argues, is a strategic asset to the United States in a region crucial to the United States' global hegemony.



—A.K.



FAMILY TIME: (From left to right) Mahmoud, Jenna, Debbie and Joel Mardon frequently discuss politics with each other. Their involvement in Palestine solidarity activism has drawn the family closer together.

PHOTO: THOMAS MARCZESKWI

Palestine Solidarity Groups in NYC

ADALAH-NY:

The New York Campaign for the Boycott of Israel
adalahny.org

AL-AWDA NEW YORK:

The Palestine Right to Return Coalition
al-awdany.org/newsite

COLUMBIA STUDENTS FOR JUSTICE IN PALESTINE

columbiasjp.org

CODEPINK NYC

codepink4peace.org

JEWS SAY NO!

jewssayno.wordpress.com

BROOKLYN FOR PEACE

brooklynpeace.org

PALESTINE EDUCATION PROJECT

thinkpep.net

JEWS FOR RACIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

jfrej.org

Additional Resources

For a resource guide to understanding the Israel-Palestine conflict, please visit indypendent.org.

For more about the conflict in Gaza, see page 12 of this issue.

FINANCE BILL MISSES THE MARK

We need to restructure Wall Street, not just regulate it

BY ROBERT REICH

The most important thing to know about the 1,500-page financial reform bill passed by the U.S. Senate on May 20 — now on the way to being reconciled with the House bill — is that it is regulatory. It does nothing to change the structure of Wall Street.

The bill omits two critical ideas for changing the structure of Wall Street's biggest banks so they won't cause more trouble in the future, and leaves a third idea in limbo. The White House does not support any of them.

First, although the Senate bill seeks to avoid the "too big to fail" problem by pushing failing banks into an "orderly" bankruptcy-type process, this regulatory approach is not enough. The Senate roundly rejected an amendment that would have broken up the biggest banks by imposing caps on the deposits they could hold and on their capital assets.

You do not have to be an algorithm-wielding Wall Street whiz-kid to understand that the best way to prevent a bank from becoming too big to fail is preventing it from becoming too big in the first place. The size of Wall Street's five giants already equals a large percentage of the U.S. gross domestic product.

That makes them too big to fail almost by definition, because if one or two get into trouble — as they did in 2008 — their demise would shake the foundations of the financial system, even if there were an "orderly" way to liquidate them. Because traders and investors know they are too big to fail, these banks have a huge competitive advantage over smaller banks.

Another crucial provision left out of the Senate bill would be to change the structure of banking by resurrecting the Depression-era Glass-Steagall Act and force banks to separate commercial banking (the classic function of connecting lenders to borrowers) from investment banking.

WHY DERIVATIVES MATTER

Here, too, the bill takes a regulatory approach instead. It includes a provision barring banks from "proprietary trading," or making market bets with their own capital. Even if this regulation were tough enough (and the current Senate bill requires various delays and studies before it is applied), it would not erode the giant banks' monopoly over derivatives trading, adding to their power and inevitable "too big to fail" status.

Which brings us to the third structural idea, advanced by Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.). She would force the banks to do

their derivative trades in entities separate from their commercial banking.

This measure is still in the bill, but is on life-support after former Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker, Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner and Fed Chair Ben Bernanke came out against it. Republicans hate it. The biggest banks detest it. Virtually every major Wall Street and business lobbyist has its guns trained on it. Almost no one in Washington believes it will survive the upcoming conference committee.

rely on their government-insured deposits for the capital.

Wall Street's lobbyists have fought tooth and nail against these three ideas because all would change the structure of America's biggest banks. The lobbyists won on the first two, and the Street has signaled its willingness to accept the Dodd bill, without Lincoln's measure.

The interesting question is why the President, who says he wants to get "tough" on banks, has also turned his back on changing

remove the exemption of private insurers from the nation's antitrust laws.

Regulations do not work if the underlying structure of an industry — be it banking or healthcare — got us into trouble in the first place. Wall Street's big banks are just too big, and their ability to draw on commercial deposits for investment banking activities, including derivatives, will make them even bigger. It will also subject the economy to greater and greater risks in the future. No amount of regulation can cure that.

Similarly, the underlying system of private for-profit health insurance is a key driver of America's bloated and ineffective health care delivery. We can try to regulate it like mad, but no amount of regulation will cure this fundamental problem.

LOOHOLE

A regulatory, rather than structural approach, to deep-seated problems in complex industries like banking and healthcare is also vulnerable to the inevitable erosion that occurs when industry lobbyists insert themselves into the regulatory process. Tiny loopholes get larger. Delays get longer. Legislative words are warped and distorted to mean what industry wants them to mean.

Both Senate and House financial reform bills exempt "customized" derivatives from the exchanges, for example, but leave it to regulators to define what contracts will be excused. Yet many of the derivatives that caused the most trouble (read: Goldman Sachs' and other banks' deals with AIG) might well be thought of as customized. Another potential problem: In assigning consumer protection to the Fed, the bill puts it under Fed chiefs who in the past displayed a patent disregard for such safeguards (read: Alan Greenspan).

Inevitably, top regulators move into the industry they are putatively trying to regulate, while top guns in the industry move temporarily into regulatory positions. This revolving door of regulation also serves over time to erode all serious attempts at overseeing an industry.

The only way to have a lasting effect on industries as large and intransigent as banking and healthcare is to alter their structure. That was the approach taken to finance by Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s, and by Lyndon Johnson to healthcare (Medicare) in the 1960s.

So why has Obama consistently chosen regulation over restructuring? Because restructuring Wall Street or healthcare would surely elicit firestorms from these industries. Both are politically powerful, and Obama did not want to take them on directly.

A regulatory approach allows for more bargaining, not only in the legislative process but also, over time, in the rule-making process as legislation is put into effect. It is always possible to placate an industry with a carefully chosen loophole or vague legislative language that will allow the industry to go on much as before.

And that's precisely the problem.

Robert Reich served as U.S. Secretary of Labor from 1993 to 1997. This article was adapted from a longer version originally published on robertreich.org.



LISA LIN

4 REASONS THE RESTORING AMERICAN FINANCIAL STABILITY ACT OF 2010 WILL FAIL:

- It does not get rid of "too big to fail" banks.
- It does not create a Glass-Steagall-style firewall between commercial banking (the classic function of connecting lenders to borrowers) and investment banking.
- It leaves open dangerous loopholes in the regulation of derivatives adding to the big banks' power and inevitable "too big to fail" status.
- It keeps taxpayers on the hook for future bailouts.

But it's critical. For years the big banks have relied on taxpayer-funded deposit insurance to backstop their lucrative derivative businesses. Obviously they want the subsidy to continue. Bernanke argues that "depository institutions use derivatives to help mitigate the risks of their normal banking activities." True, but irrelevant. Lincoln's measure would allow banks to continue to use derivatives. They just could not

the structure of U.S. banks — opting for a regulatory approach instead.

It's almost exactly like healthcare reform. Ideas for changing the structure of the healthcare industry — single payer, Medicare for all, even a so-called "public option" — were all jettisoned by the White House in favor of a complex set of regulations that left the old system of private for-profit health insurers in place. The final healthcare act doesn't even

PEW POLL: 'SOCIALISM' NOT SUCH A DIRTY WORD

Americans are constantly reminded about both the wonders of capitalism and the dangers of socialism. However, a recent poll by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center indicates that a lot of people still aren't getting the message.

The nationwide survey, which tested reactions to words and phrases frequently used in current political discourse, found that only slightly more than half the public (52 percent) reacts positively to the word "capitalism" compared to 37 percent who say they have a negative reaction. Fewer than half of young people, women, people with lower incomes and those

with less education react positively to "capitalism."

Despite being almost nonexistent as a political force in the United States, "socialism" received an overall positive rating of 29 percent. Young people (ages 18-29) were equally divided with 43 percent reacting positively to the word "socialism" and 43 percent having a positive reaction to "capitalism."

The poll was conducted from April 21 to 26 and was composed of a random sampling of 1,546 people.

—JOHN TARLETON

VOICES OF REASON

Four progressive economic experts speak out

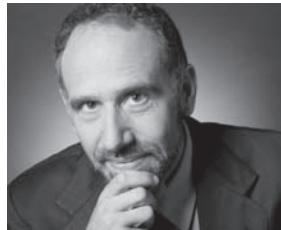
DEAN BAKER: DEMAND ACCOUNTABILITY

The same people who caused this disaster are still calling the shots. Specifically, there has been little change in personnel and no acknowledgment of error at the central banks whose incompetence was responsible for the crisis.

Remarkably, this crew of incompetents is still claiming papal infallibility, warning governments and the general public that bad things will happen if they are subjected to more oversight. Instead, the central bankers and their accomplices at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are dictating policies to democratically elected governments. Their agenda seems to be the same everywhere, cut back retirement benefits, reduce public support for healthcare, weaken unions and make ordinary workers take pay cuts.

Before anyone listens to Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke, European Central Bank President Jean-Claude Trichet or IMF Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn, they should first be forced to tell us when they stopped being wrong about the economy. We cannot afford to let these subprime central bankers control economic policy any longer.

Excerpted from an article that was originally published on Huffington Post (huffingtonpost.com). Dean Baker is the co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research (cepr.net) in Washington, D.C.



MARK WEISBROT: CLASS AND THE EURO-CRISIS

In mid-May, the Euro was plummeting because the financial markets wanted more blood: They wanted Greece, Spain, Portugal and the other currently victimized countries of Europe (Italy and Ireland) to commit to more spending cuts and tax increases. Then they got what they wanted, and within a day or two, the Euro started crashing again because “the markets” discovered that these procyclical policies would actually make things worse in the countries that adopted them and reduce growth in the whole Eurozone.

Unfortunately the European authorities — especially the European Central Bank — are even worse than the markets. They are less ambivalent and more committed to punishing the weaker economies by having them cut spending even if it causes or deepens recession and mass unemployment (over 20 percent in Spain).

There is a class dimension to all of this, with the European Union (EU) authorities and the bankers united in wanting to balance the books on the backs of the workers — and adopt “labor market reforms” that will weaken labor and redistribute income upward for generations to come. The EU authorities and financiers believe that real wages must fall quite sharply in these countries in order to make them internationally competitive — but the protesters are responding with a fiscal version of “No justice, no peace.”

Excerpted from an article that was originally published in the Guardian (guardian.co.uk). Mark Weisbrot is co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research.

NOMI PRINS: SHADOW BANKERS

Despite all the noise about financial reform, the shadow banking system that helped create the financial crisis would remain fundamentally unaltered by the legislation now pending in Congress. Indeed, leveraged entities such as private-equity, venture-capital, and hedge funds get only minor regulatory attention.

These barely regulated, nontransparent bastions of speculation propagated systemic risks beyond any that could be created by the banks themselves. Whether housed at banks, created by banks, or freestanding, they exist to enable speculative risk-taking hidden from either regulatory or market scrutiny, while camouflaging layers of debt and enabling the complex-securitization deals that caused the financial collapse.

Yet, neither the House bill passed last December nor the most recent Senate bill does more than impose marginal adjustments on the shadow banking system.



Excerpted from an article that was originally published on The American Prospect (prospect.org). Nomi Prins is a former managing director at Goldman Sachs and author of It Takes a Pillage: Behind the Bailouts, Bonuses, and Backroom Deals from Washington to Wall Street.



DOUG HENWOOD: TIME TO START OVER

The dog-eat-dog model of social Darwinism worked well (on its own terms) while the United States was growing rapidly in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but since growth slowed down in the 1970s, we have been in need of a rethink of the old model. But we are incapable of it. Instead, we have tried ever more reckless applications of debt to keep things going. The recent financial crisis looked like a major affront to that approach, but we are now emerging from the crisis phase without things having changed all that much. The country seems to be rotting from within, but the political and ideological systems are incapable of recognizing that fact.

Excerpted from a lecture Henwood gave at the Studies in Political Economy annual meeting in Ottawa, Canada, in January. He is the editor of Left Business Observer (leftbusinessobserver.com), a monthly newsletter on economics and politics.



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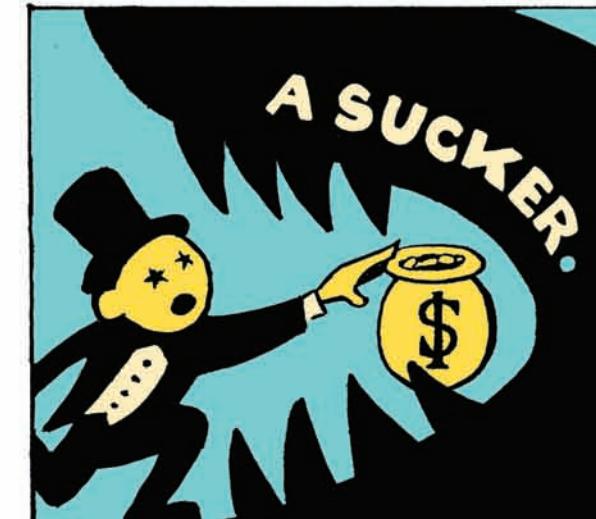
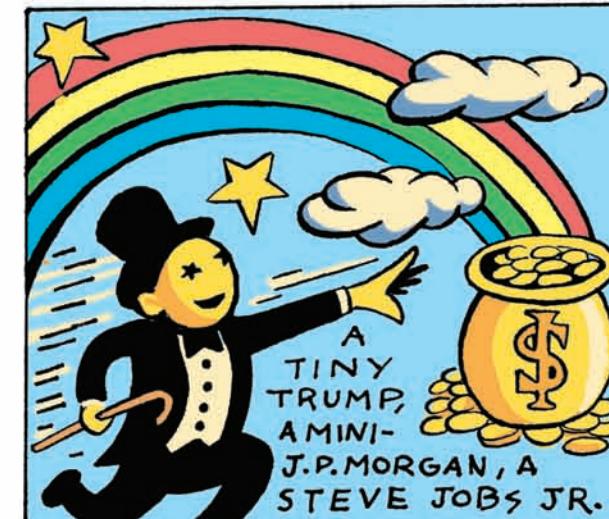
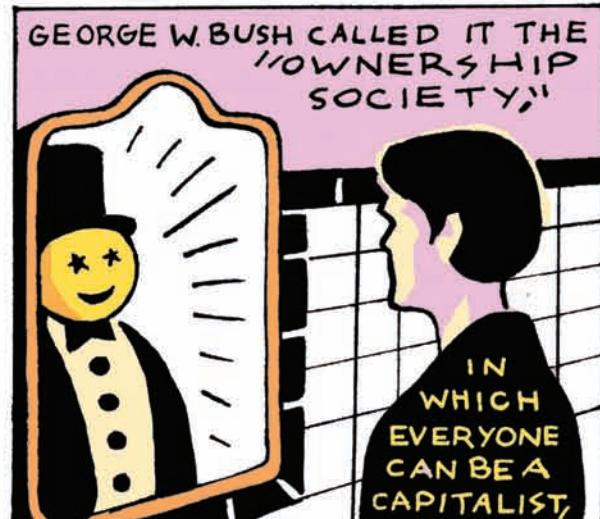
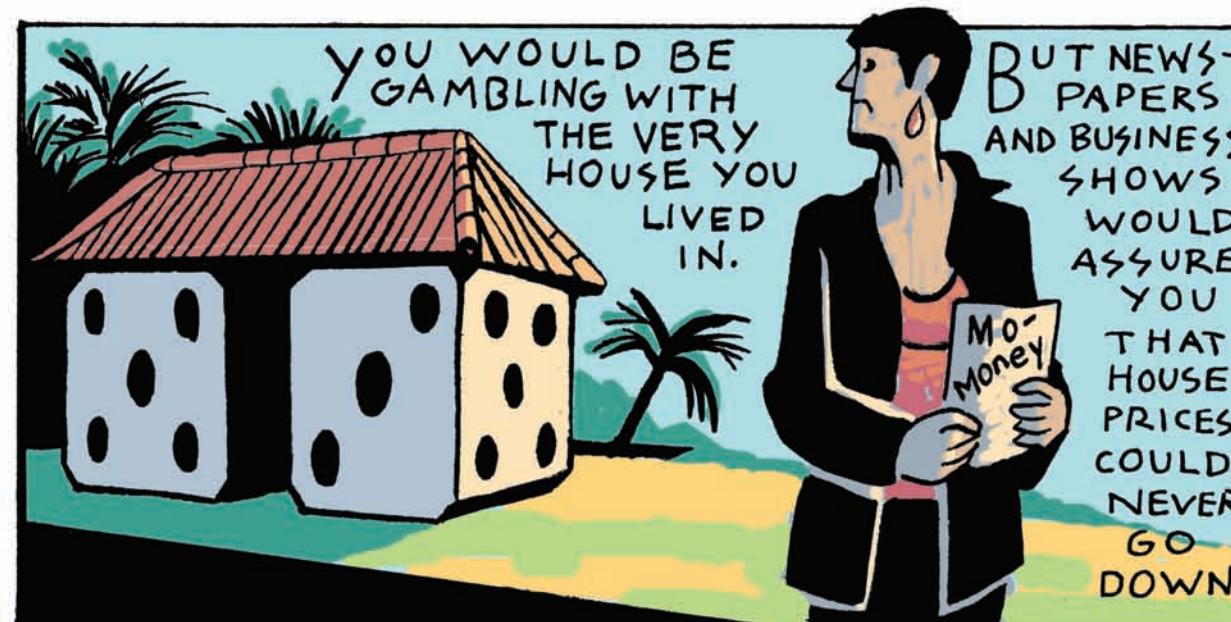
UNDERSTANDING THE CRASH

New book shows how we got into the Great Recession
... and how we can get out of it.

When the end of the housing bubble sent Wall Street into a nosedive, it created a disastrous economic downturn that the rest of us are still struggling to survive. Two years later, Congress is trying — and failing — to pass financial reform to stop the lending practices that led to the bubble and put the banking behemoths that speculated on it on a tight leash.

A new book, *Understanding the Crash* (Soft Skull Press, June 2010), uses a graphic nonfiction format to cut through the confusion and explain how mortgage lenders and investment banks managed to crash the economy. Authors Seth Tobocman, Eric Laursen and Jessica Wehrle show how low- and middle-income homeowners became a gold mine for lenders and speculators — until it all came crashing down — and what is needed to build a financial system that instead rewards community and sustainability. Here's some of what they found.

Copyright © 2010 by Seth Tobocman, Eric Laursen and Jessica Wehrle from *Understanding the Crash*. Reprinted with permission of Counterpoint.



FROM UNDERSTANDING THE CRASH BY SETH TOBOCMAN, ERIC LAURSEN AND JESS WEHRLE

'SOLDIERS WERE OPENING FIRE'

Adam Shapiro of the Free Gaza Movement Describes the Flotilla Attack

GAZA UNDER SIEGE

Israel seized the Gaza Strip in 1967 and adjusted its military occupation in 2005 when it redeployed its forces outside the territory. However, Gaza, a 139-square-mile coastal enclave that runs along the Mediterranean Sea, remains a flashpoint in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as Israel continues to exert near total control over Gaza's borders, its economy and its infrastructure:

JANUARY 2006: Frustrated by years of corruption and unfulfilled promises, Gaza's 1.4 million residents oust the Western-backed Fatah party in free and fair elections in favor of Hamas, an Islamist movement respected by the local populace for providing a wide range of social services.

JUNE 2007: Intermittent fighting between Hamas and Fatah-backed security forces ends with Fatah being routed and expelled from Gaza. Israel and Egypt impose a full land, air and sea blockade that decimates Gaza's economy. According to U.N. statistics, 70 percent of Gazans live on less than \$1 a day, 75 percent rely on food aid and 60 percent have no daily access to water.

AUGUST 23, 2008: Activists in a boat carrying humanitarian aid successfully arrive in Gaza. A second ship carrying aid arrives in Gaza in October 2008. It would be the last time to date that Gaza freedom activists succeed in completing this journey.

DECEMBER 2008 – JANUARY 2009: Israel responds to the sporadic firing of homemade rockets from Gaza into the southern Israeli towns of Sderot and Beersheba with Operation Cast Lead, an overwhelming invasion of Gaza that kills 1,400 people, the majority of them civilians, and reduces much of Gaza to rubble. A boat with emergency medical supplies whose passengers include former U.S. Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney is rammed at sea by Israeli warships and forced to dock in Lebanon.

DECEMBER 2009: 1,300 members of the Gaza Freedom March gather in Cairo to try to cross Gaza's southern border, which is controlled by Egypt, a key Middle East ally of the United States and Israel. Gaza Freedom March participants are repeatedly harassed and attacked by Egyptian security forces during their time in the country. About 80 members of the delegation, including *Indy* reporter Alex Kane, are ultimately allowed to enter Gaza.

MAY 30, 2010: At least nine Gaza Freedom Flotilla activists are killed and dozens injured when Israeli commandos storm six ships carrying humanitarian supplies to Gaza. The attack, which took place in international waters about 40 miles off the Gaza coast, sets off a wave of protests around the world.

MAY 31, 2010: The Gaza Freedom Flotilla begins making plans to send more relief ships to Gaza.

—INDYDEPENDENT STAFF

On May 30, Israeli commandos stormed an unarmed flotilla of a half-dozen ships bringing humanitarian supplies to the people of the Gaza Strip. At least nine activists are reported to have been killed and dozens more injured when Israeli troops opened fire on the passengers of one of the six ships. As *The Indypendent* goes to press, Israel is blaming participants in the Gaza Freedom Flotilla for what happened, while hundreds of surviving members of the flotilla remain in Israeli custody, unable to speak to the media.

In a May 31 interview with Amy Goodman, host of the daily news hour *Democracy Now!*, Adam Shapiro of the Free Gaza Movement described a very different picture of the Israeli raid:

AMY GOODMAN: Adam, can you tell us what you understand has happened?

ADAM SHAPIRO: The Israelis launched a military operation involving about a thousand soldiers, using ships, using helicopters and using airplanes to attack the flotilla of six ships — three passenger and three cargo ships — at approximately between 8 and 9 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. All the ships have been captured. One of the ships that we know for sure, which had a satellite communication ability, the large Turkish ship with about 600 passengers including members of parliament from different countries, was attacked by Israeli soldiers using live ammunition.

AG: Israeli military reports say that when they boarded the Turkish ship, that they were attacked by sticks and knives. What do you understand has happened?

AS: Our people on the ship reported live as the soldiers came onto the ship and reported that soldiers were opening fire as they were coming onto the ship and they were descending from helicopters. So, our understanding is that the Israeli soldiers opened fire first. I have not seen or heard any thing else about — and there are many journalists on board that ship — anything else about our people, the passengers on that ship, posing any kind of threat.

AG: Adam Shapiro, what is the purpose of the Free Gaza Flotilla?

AS: The purpose of the Gaza Freedom Flotilla was to literally break the Israeli blockade that it is imposing on Gaza, a form of collective punishment of 1.5 million Palestinians who are trying to survive at this point, especially after the Israeli attacks in December 2008 to January 2009, in which much of Gaza was reduced to rubble and has not been able to be rebuilt, where Palestinians can't get basic food and medicine in, to just survive with. And so, this effort was, yes, to deliver the goods and materials that the Palestinians in Gaza need, but also to awaken the in-



A SEA OF ANGER: Shocked and furious New Yorkers took to the streets of Midtown Manhattan May 31 in denouncing the Israeli naval attack on a ship carrying civilians and humanitarian aid that was trying to break the blockade of the Gaza Strip. PHOTO: ELLEN DAVIDSON

ternational community to the abuse that the Palestinians are suffering.

AG: What is your response to what has happened, to the Israeli military assault on the Free Gaza Flotilla?

AS: We have always been prepared that the Israelis might attack the ships and try, obviously, try to take control of them, and prevent us from reaching Gaza, but the opening of fire against unarmed civilians who pose no threat to Israel is something, I think, it is absurd in a way that can't even be described. We all remember what happened to Rachel Corrie in Gaza, standing in front of a home to protect it and being crushed and run over by a bulldozer driver. In this case, I think in a way, it is almost even worse because Israel said that they were sending their best commandos on this mission, that they were sending their most professional soldiers, and so if these are their professional soldiers, and they opened fire, then we must assume that they had orders to open fire. Because

I don't think that soldiers operating in this way, if they were truly professional, and they were truly the best, well-trained commandos that Israel had, they would have no reason to shoot, unless they were ordered to do so.

And I really hope that the United States, the Europeans and Turkey and the other governments who had citizens on board press for an independent investigation, not an Israeli investigation, an independent investigation. This attack took place in international waters, not in Israeli waters.

This interview was adapted from the May 31 Democracy Now! transcripts. Adam Shapiro is a board member of the Free Gaza Movement (friegaza.org), one of the groups that coordinated the Freedom Flotilla. His wife Huwaida Arraf is the chairperson of the Free Gaza Movement and was on the flotilla. For the full interview, visit democrazynow.org.

WORLD LEADERS LOOK TO JAIL (SOME) PIRATES

Fifty-five nations concluded a three-day conference in Istanbul, Turkey, on May 23 with an agreement to establish an international fund to fight piracy. The fund would be used to transport alleged pirates to places where they can be put on trial. U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also promised international piracy laws would soon be streamlined.

"I will submit to [the] U.N. options for prosecuting pirates and ask the shipping industry to contribute generously," Ban said. The conference was prompted by a spate of attacks off the coast of East Africa in recent years in which Somalian pirates have ranged far into international waters to seize ships and take their passengers hostage.

—INDYDEPENDENT STAFF



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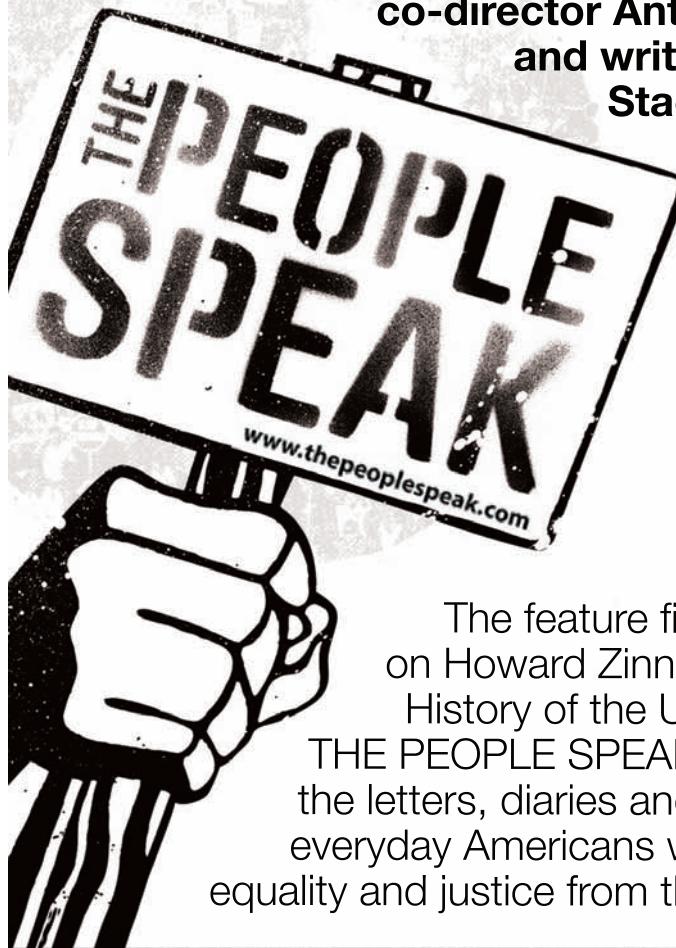
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THE REPORT OF MY DEATH. Actor Michael Graves stars as Samuel L. Clemens in One Armed Man's production of the life of Mark Twain, who died 100 years ago. Featuring previously censored and posthumously published Twain letters, stories, and historical artifacts, this one-man docudrama introduces audiences to the "other" Sam Clemens — American radical and dark prophet. Sliding scale: \$10-\$50

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REVIEW

'Undercurrents' Makes an Ecological Museum of New York City

Undercurrents: Experimental Ecosystems in Recent Art

MAY 27-JUNE 19 AT VARIOUS LOCATIONS

CURATED BY ANIK FOURNIER, MICHELLE LIM, AMANDA PARMER AND ROBERT WUILFE, WHITNEY INDEPENDENT STUDY PROGRAM CURATORIAL FELLOWS, 2009-2010

Poor George. Lonesome George, the subject of a video installation by Rachel Berwick: he's a 90-year-old tortoise from the Galápagos Islands who, thanks to some overeager biologists, is now the last surviving member of his subspecies. That's how it is to think about ecosystems in 2010 — you have to consider The End. For example: Tatsuo Miyajima and The Peace Shadow Project Team's website, peaceshadow.net, allows users to submit pictures of themselves, to be turned into shadows that mimic the haunting silhouettes left in the wake of Hiroshima; the images have been used at protests for nuclear non-proliferation. It's a compellingly doomy — and paradoxical — approach to peace activism: participants must imagine themselves as decimated, must count themselves among the future dead.

These works are part of *Undercurrents: Experimental Ecosystems in Recent Art*, on view at The Kitchen and several other sites along the Hudson River. The high-stakes politics of contemporary ecology are at times palpable as urgent murmurs, as in Gina Badger's FM radio broadcast from the Little Red Lighthouse (near the George Washington Bridge),

which combines the ambient audio of marine life and urban environs in a meditation on ecological colonialism and environmental violence. Lize Mogel's didactic *The Sludge Economy* presents a brief history of New York City sewage. Her research shows that natural waste can be treated and

Elsewhere, environmental-art collectives ecoarttech and Spurce show fragments of ongoing projects that map relationships between urban, industrial and natural systems — ambitious projects that, alas, don't translate so well into gallery art.

In ephemeral performance piec-



GINA BADGER's work combines the ambient audio of marine life and urban environs. PHOTO: The River Project's Oyster Farm at Pier 40 in New York City, courtesy of the artist and Whitney.org.

put to some use; but it also evinces waste as something scary and insurmountable. Amy Balkin's *Synthesis Report*, a video of the artist reading the publicly available *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, does not issue any polemics, it simply calls attention to this big, dense, horrifying document. Much of the show is aesthetically subtle, with a looming sense of dread acting as its driving force.

es, Emily Roysdon makes music at the Christopher Street Piers, calling attention to and taking part in the piers' history as a site of queer community and anti-gentrification struggles. Pablo Helguera presents a pleasant mini-exhibition of figurative painting: the sort of earnest traditionalism the institutionalized art world generally ignores.

Andrea Polli and Sha Sha Feng's *Sound Seeker* (soundseeker.org) is an interactive collection of ambient field recordings around the five boroughs, set to eventually grow into a sort of aural map of the city (Polli and Feng's organization, the New York Society for Acoustic Ecology, is also hosting some Soundwalks: audio tours of the High Line and the North River Waste Treatment Plant). *Sound Seeker* is simple, really: a project that captures some of the endless snarl, the systematic convolution, even the precariously fragile character of New York City life — our life. That's the other tricky thing about considering ecology in 2010: that we are, all of us, held in the balance.

—MIKE NEWTON



EMILY ROYSDON's music at the Chamber Street piers resonates with the legacy of queer community and anti-gentrification struggles there. PHOTO: Piers untitled (Below the Surface), 2009. Courtesy of the artist and Whitney.org.

In this urgent new book, Noam Chomsky surveys the dangers and prospects of our early twenty-first century. Exploring challenges such as the growing gap between North and South, American exceptionalism (including under President Barack Obama), the fiascos of Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S.-Israeli assault on Gaza, and the recent financial bailouts, he also sees hope for the future and a way to move forward—in the democratic wave in Latin America and in the global solidarity movements that suggest "real progress toward freedom and justice."

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Reclaiming the Environmental Revolution

AN INTERVIEW WITH *GREEN GONE WRONG* AUTHOR HEATHER ROGERS

BY IRINA IVANOVA

If you've ever taken comfort in buying "certified fair trade" instead of just organic, or optimistic about driving a fully electric vehicle within the next five years, you'll have to think again.

Heather Rogers' *Green Gone Wrong: How Our Economy Is Undermining the Environmental Revolution* dismantles the many feel-good myths about conscious consumption with an indictment of "green capitalism." Rogers tackles issues as diverse as housing, transportation, biofuels and the organic-food niche market in a broad look at how the United States' over-reliance on market solutions is proving fatal to the planet. While left-inclined readers may have some idea of the perverse tangles thus engendered, this is an expansive look at just how far off track market-based environmentalism has gotten us.

But the outlook isn't all bad. Rogers' detailed analysis demonstrates that we do have the technology for systemic change, if politics permit. *Green Gone Wrong* doesn't dumb down the information, and while the science is largely settled, fully grasping the myriad social, economic and political implications can take some patience. The mess we are in is complicated, and Rogers shines a glaring light on an issue that is more pressing than any of us care to admit.

Read it alongside George Monbiot's *Heat* (Doubleday of Canada, 2006) for maximum impact, or Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us* (Thomas Dunne Books, 2007) to feel better about the alternative.

IRINA IVANOVA: *I don't think any of us would disagree with your basic analysis that we can't pursue only market solutions to effect the green revolution, but isn't green capitalism a step up from business as usual?*

HEATHER ROGERS: A lot of these so-called "green" products that are marketed to us as solutions are incapable of turning our dirty economy into a green economy. The market — the lever of supply and demand — isn't capable of doing that. But it's not just that "green" products are ultimately ineffective: they can derail deeper changes like significant energy and agriculture policy changes, things that we really need in order to protect the environment.

I went to this organic sugar plantation in South America that provides a third of all the organic sugar consumed in the United States. They're expanding their organic cropland on land that's been deforested, so the native ecosystem is being cleared in order to grow "green," environmentally sound crops. This isn't what people have in mind when they see the organic seal on the products they buy, but it's what's happening. There's still a motivation for the industrial food system to transform organic, instead of the reverse, because our economy has to grow in order to avoid crisis. That means doing things like clearing forests in order

to meet market demand for organic food, and doing it as cheaply as possible.

II: *Isn't this a Catch-22? For any consumer or grassroots demand to be effective it has to grow to a large scale, but once it's large enough, it runs the risk of getting folded into this larger industrial system.*

HR: Right, so do you have one large organic farm, or do you have a hundred smaller farms? There's a popular phrase these days, "vote with your wallet." One of the things we can do to make sure that our food comes from the hundred organic farms is to understand that shopping is not voting. Shopping is not political participation. We need to engage in politics and understand ourselves as political actors; and that means practicing environmentalism in a range of ways.

I went to upstate New York to some small farms that practice this incredibly biodiverse, environmentally conscious, holistic type of farming. It's ecologically sustainable, but the problem is that it's not economically sustainable. [Their products are] expensive, and it's easy to assume these farmers are making a good living, but they're not, because it costs so much more to farm the way they do, and they don't have the kind of support that conventional farmers have.

If these people are supposed to lead the transformation of the food system, they have to be able to earn a living. One farmer I interviewed earned \$7 an hour. And the only reason he can continue operating is that he inherited his farmland. Small farms in the United States only earn 5 to 15 percent of their income from selling their produce. 85 to 95 percent of the income on small farms is earned from off the farm — the farmer or spouse has another job; maybe they have a trust fund. We need to change the rules so that it isn't just profitability that keeps businesses and farms going, but their ability to support the health of ecosystems and human health.

II: *There's a widespread assumption that buying from your local green market is the easiest and best thing you can do for the sustainable-food economy. It seems like such a direct and obvious action.*

HR: It's unfortunate, but it's the story that nobody's talking about. One of the big problems that these farmers face is distribution. There just aren't distribution networks, so they're all trucking down their vegetables to farmers' markets in different trucks; and then there's the criticism that there's all this carbon [output] so local farming isn't that environmentally sound. But there was a distribution network for local farmers that developed in the 1970s and 1980s, with the back-to-the-land movement and the rise of modern organic farming. The health-food stores that grew up at the same time had direct connections to local farms. Then one health-food store owner started buying up these distribution networks in different parts of the country, and over the course of a couple of decades, all of these networks were consolidated.

This is what happens under capitalism: consolidation shuts down the local systems that are seen as redundant. Now these farmers are reinventing the wheel, basically, and a lot of them don't even know that there was a distribution network in place before. There has to be a different motivating force besides expanding profits.

II: *I was also fascinated by your description of the problems around American-manufactured cars.*

HR: It's one of the more complex stories in the book. In 1913, the Ford Model T got 26 miles to the gallon. And now, the Ford F-150 truck gets 15 miles to the gallon. Those extra miles went into luxury. There are efficiency gains in the auto industry each year, but in the United States those gains get poured into creating more luxury, more powerful engines, bigger seats — the list goes on. The reason is if you beef up those parts, the profit margins increase. If you



AUTHOR HEATHER ROGERS delivers an indictment of green capitalism.

put those efficiencies into greater fuel economy, they can't guarantee the same profits.

The [U.S.] Environmental Protection Agency does the testing to determine fuel efficiency, but since they started doing this in the 1970s, they overestimate the miles per gallon. And unlike SUVs and large trucks, where the profit margins are in the thousands of dollars, small, fuel-efficient cars yield smaller profits, and sometimes they're even money-losers.

II: *If consuming smarter isn't the answer, does it come down to consuming less? And how do you drive that message home to people who don't want to hear it?*

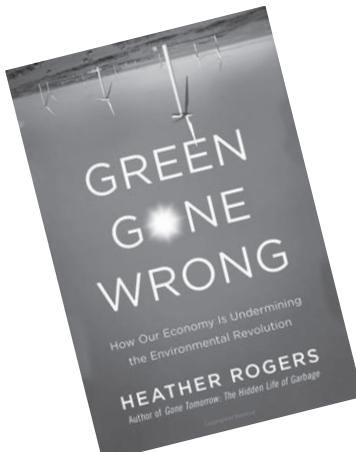
HR: We need to consume less, bottom line. Part of that is having a mature politics, whereby we can figure out how to do that without diminishing our quality of life. If we can separate development from growth, then we make steps in that direction. It's not a product that people can buy — it's a political and social process. We all need the environment; the point isn't to not touch it — we need the food and materials that we extract from it to meet our daily needs. But how can we do that without destroying the planet? There's nothing innately human about the amount and toxicity of waste that Americans create — it's [a function of] our economic and political system.

II: *So is this a question of policy, or individual involvement?*

HR: Well, it's both. In Freiburg, Germany, 15,000 people live in two different eco-communities that have been around for over a dozen years. They have super-energy-efficient housing, transportation systems that prioritize mass transit and bicycles over cars, they have car sharing for people who need cars — it's a very well-designed project with a mix of energy sources like wood waste, solar and wind, and some natural gas, but they use their energy very frugally. The community is mixed-income.

And the neighborhood is the product of an ongoing process of engagement. The people who live there worked together to start the neighborhood and continue to maintain it. They work with the local government — they've influenced some federal policies — but they understand it's an ongoing process. The day after I left, there was a meeting with the City Council, because the city is constantly trying to get the community to ease their rules [regarding car ownership], and they don't want to.

There's going to be pushback. There's going to be political pushback and pushback from corporations, so we need to have an engagement that goes beyond the point of purchase.



Class In Session, Art In Practice?

A LOOK AT ART AND PUBLIC PEDAGOGY IN NEW YORK CITY

BY MIMI LUSE

In the late 1990s, an art movement called relational aesthetics undertook, according to theoretician Nicholas Bourriaud, to put art to work. The idea was that art-making would be a socially progressive act, repairing the social gaps identified by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*: the fragmenting of community, the demise of collaboration and so on. The art world responded by putting this principle into practice naively, with tepid gestures like serving communal meals in white-walled galleries. By 2004, influential *ArtForum* critics Claire Bishop and Grant Kester had denounced relational aesthetics for its art-world myopia, distinguishing it from a socially conscious, "generative" art practice (Kester cited a performance by Rirkrit Tiravanija happening next door to a homeless shelter where the occupants were facing eviction).

In response to the backlash, relational art turned toward explicitly fostering "socially transformative" art that would incite debate and give participants agency. Following suit, the art world at large has experienced a curatorial trend, emphasizing interactive, teachable engagement with art. With the recent publication of a book on the subject by Distributed Art Publishers, that trend has gained a name: *The Educational Turn*, or "the pedagogical impulse."

One manifestation, the lecture form, is a kind of podium-performance art with roots in the art of Joseph Beuys: the artist as semi-shamanistic pedagogue. But "art practice" has set its sights beyond the solo performance at the lectern, on cooperative and collaborative education. The result, particularly evident in New York City, has been a preponderance of artist-run, school-like projects, all of them free or nearly so, and a flurry of talk about pedagogy.

THE EDUCATIONAL TURN AND EDUCATIONAL CRISIS
In a March editorial for the online journal *E-Flux*, Irit Rogoff questioned the art world's educational turn in the context of a greater educational crisis: "[A]t a time when even the status quo of many educational institutions is threat-

ened by budget cuts, tuition hikes, and measures ... to standardize and regiment learning (see for instance the ... protests throughout the University of California system or the Bologna Process in general), and [when simultaneously] the art world increasingly seems to absorb an 'educational turn' ... it becomes ... important to consider how forms of learning and exchange, of thinking and making, can take place within unstable configurations — which may or may not be educational or instructive — unrestricted by measurable outcomes or predetermined expectations."

I attempted to answer this question in a tour of some of New York City's anti-institutions of pedagogy: 16Beaver; The Public School; and The Bruce High Quality Foundation University (BHQFU). All different, they hold in common that they are free, do not focus on results and are run by artists. Of course, these classes — which are considered public pedagogy in the vague, still developing sense of the term — are limited to people who are on mailing lists for nonprofit art organizations, who can afford leisure time, and for certain classes offered, who already have some grasp of theory. They are a rarified pursuit to say the least. I had no illusions that these "schools" could replace the higher education system; but I was curious to see whether or not these organizations, providing a form of pedagogy exactly opposite to accredited education, could provide even a rough sketch of a real educational turn — an art practice that amounted to a real social contribution.

CURRICULUM

16Beaver's events are lecture- and seminar-based, tending toward the jargon-heavy, if idea-rich, literature of academic art criticism. At "On Militant Research," held at The New Museum, a mix of graduate students and activists had a self-reflexive conversation about a working-class revolution. The presenters felt complicit here and were self-conscious about the location. Activists, artists and academics whose research was neither traditional grass-roots activism nor arts, nor social science, but a hybrid of all three, presented their work. Afterward, we watched clips from films that researched social issues.

At The Bruce High Quality Foun-

dation, things were much more informal; anyone was allowed in. I attended a writing group, where we reviewed an article I was working on. My classmates gave me pragmatic advice and suggested I pitch it to certain publications. Then we moved patiently through a film treatment that another classmate brought in. In the last hour, one of the Bruce collective members shared a photocopy of a story from James Joyce's *Dubliners*. We each read aloud and discussed it in uninhibited terms.

The Public School is not one single school, but a network of locations centered around a message board-style website, on which anyone can propose a class. The result is an open-source curriculum that is only lightly vetted by a nonhierarchical board with rotating membership. Though founded in Los Angeles by Sean Dockery, in New York, the school was originally for architects. It has since expanded its audience. Classes include a D.I.Y. Nonprofit Class; Yogic Body Rolling; How to Project 16mm and 8mm Film, and Disorganizing Sound: 20th Century Improvised Music. I attended the first of a two-session class, The Public School and *Democracy Now!*: The Future of Progressive Media, that involved a field trip to the stu-

dios of *Democracy Now!* in Chelsea and a discussion on the role of advocacy journalism with veteran journalist Karen Ranucci.

PRACTICE MAKES PURPOSE?

For different reasons, each of these classes was personally enriching. But to understand these projects within the context of art practice required a substantial amount of research and preparatory reading. Theory overshadowed my experiences, prioritizing the form over the content; and in order to understand what I had enrolled in, a master's degree in art history would have been handy — and there's an obvious irony in needing a master's to understand the anti-institutions of the educational turn.

Despite the gargantuan burden that theory sometimes places upon artists to engage with social issues, it would be disingenuous to try to see these events as anything more than

poetic gestures that coincide with and reflect upon a heightened concern with education. Caught up in the promises of theory, perhaps concrete social contribution is too much to demand from the eternally unpragmatic field of art.



GUERRUNTZ

SCHOOL'S IN FOR SUMMER >>

BY IRINA IVANOVA • ILLUSTRATIONS BY GUERRUNTZ

Keep your mind fresh and your hands crafty with these free or almost-free classes, geared toward giving busy adults a fun summer.

The **SECRETSCIENCECLUB** is a free monthly lecture series at the Bell House (149 7th St., Brooklyn), featuring storied scientists talking about things you didn't even know were important. The next talk, June 8, explores the family secrets you might discover by examining your DNA and its moral and ethical implications. Details can be found at: secretscienceclub.blogspot.com.



Learn to be handy around the house with **FIXERS' COLLECTIVE**. Meetings are held on Thursday evenings at Proteus Gowanus (543 Union St., Brooklyn). RSVP in advance at fixerscollective.org.



Or become technologically adept at **NYC RESISTOR**, a hackers' collective that meets regularly in downtown Brooklyn. They offer a variety of classes, that, while not quite cheap, beat going to school for a computer science degree. Check out nycresistor.com/about.

At **ETSY CRAFT NIGHT**, held on Monday's at Etsy's DUMBO offices (55 Washington St., Brooklyn), each week features a different project, or feel free to bring your own. Details are available at: etsy.com/storque/search/title/craft-night-brooklyn.



BROOKLYN BRAINERY offers \$25 collaborative classes on a variety of topics, from how to make perfume to how to make decisions. Check out the catalog at brooklynbrainery.com/courses. The group is currently looking for a new space that will house more classes, a lending library of tools and supplies, and more.

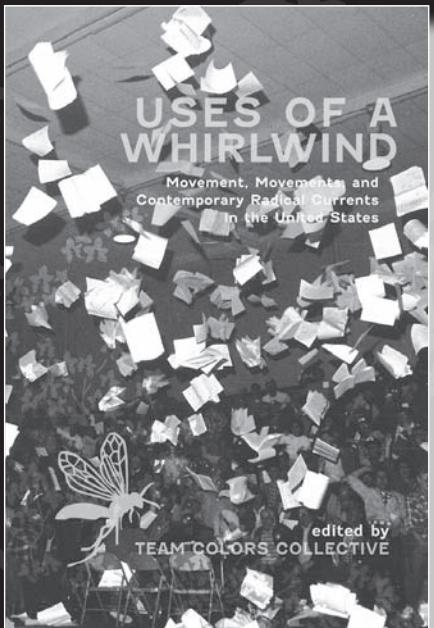
TRADE SCHOOL, the Lower East Side experiment that allowed students to barter for practical classes through the month of February, is temporarily closed, but the classes were so popular, they're raising funds to reopen in September. Track their progress and check out last February's classes at tradeschool.ourgoods.org.

In the midst of continual crisis, it is more important than ever that we understand our social movements ... where they came from, where they stand, and where we all can go if we work together.

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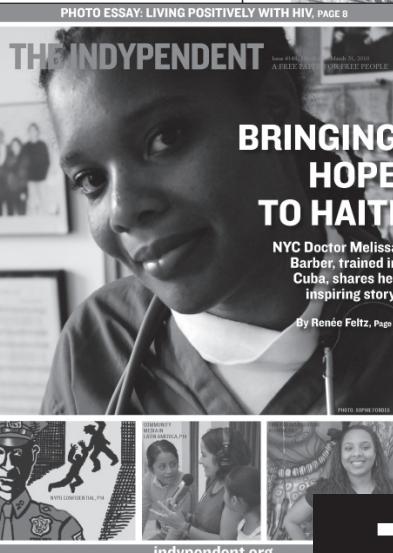
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BED-STUY MED VOLUNTEERS STEP UP IN HAITI, PAGE 4

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REVIEWS

TAKE IT TO THE STREETS

Street Art from City Walls to the Silver Screen

Exit Through the Gift Shop

DIRECTED BY BANKSY; RELEASED BY
PRODUCERS DISTRIBUTION AGENCY

For the most part, *Exit Through the Gift Shop* follows Thierry Guetta, a French amateur cameraman with long sideburns that merge with his mustache from under a fedora. The owner of a vintage clothing shop in Los Angeles, Guetta is an obsessive recorder who shoots practically every moment of his life on video, collecting tape after tape, without ever watching them. A fixation with the L.A. underground channels that obsession into a close documentary relationship with the city's most significant and illusive street artists. He soon finds himself a part of their world, where the covert act of creativity — on dangerous rooftops in the cloak of night — is equal to or greater than the art itself.

The film begins with an overview of street art, but it skips the graffiti-writing days of New York City subway tunnels during the 1970s, before the movement evolved globally into other art forms like wheatpasting, stenciling and above-ground murals. The focus is on two prominent contemporary street artists: Shepard Fairey, best known for his OBEY sticker campaign, "Hope" Obama portrait, and most recently, a May Day mural on Houston near Bowery inaugurating his show at Deitch Projects (on display until December, it's the gallery's last before it closes); and Banksy, whose satirical subversions include an inflatable doll resembling a hooded Guantánamo inmate conspicuously placed in Disneyland, and a defaced £1 million banknote on which the visage of Princess Diana replaces that of Queen Elizabeth II.

Banksy is the real star of *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, forcing Thierry out from behind the camera to become the main subject. The British artist appears as a low-lit, hooded figure, shrewdly presenting his own work while creating a caricature of street art collectors and documentarians. In any case, Banksy grasps the importance



BANKSY interviewed in his studio in *Exit Through the Gift Shop*.

of documentation for the purpose of magnifying his impact beyond traditional geographical limits.

Street art is often inaccessible, found in abandoned lots behind chain-link fences, just below the cornice of buildings, or on billboards along a highway. For documentarians of the art, much of the thrill is in the challenge of finding the artwork, and it's necessary to adopt the mindset of a street artist to locate it.

The creator of the graffiti website eyegunk.net, who we'll call Mike, has taken more than 50,000 street-art photographs since 2004; he's a master of deciphering the interlocking letters that are a hallmark of graffiti. Unlike Guetta, Mike conceals his identity, attracting minimal attention with his short red beard, thinly rimmed glasses and plain wool hat. [Eygunk.com](http://eyegunk.com) aggregates street art from disparate and inaccessible spaces in a virtual exhibition, but Mike's documentary approach emphasizes the artwork's location. "Part of doing good street art," he explained, "is paying attention to where it goes."

Nor does Mike share Guetta's obsession with documenting. He started photographing street art simply as a way to remember it; but his photos have found greater purpose on his website. "I am not just interested in documenting graffiti," he said, "but in replicating the sense of awe that you have when you see a piece up close in person."

During the 1980s, graffiti in New York started to distinguish itself as an art form after artists like Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat

attracted major art dealers and collectors. Many pioneers of the New York graffiti world were unable to gain Banksy's international recognition — or have intentionally avoided it — and have since crossed over into other careers like public transportation, education, design and fashion.

Jesee Pais, a dean at the New Design High School in the Lower East Side, brings together pioneers from the graffiti world in the *Rooftop Legends Project*, a mural exhibit that fuses traditional graffiti with popular urban characters and is repainted with new artwork every year by notable artists like Part, Kaves, Knows, Spot, Can2, Zephyr, Ewok and Case2, many of whom Pais knows personally from his days as a New York graffiti artist during the 1980s.

Exit Through the Gift Shop holds street artists up to a funhouse mirror: while it offers insight into their artwork, it also suggests that art could be a ruse. The film unfolds like an elaborate prank, where the boundary between fiction and reality is intentionally erased. And it resonates with street art's anarchist spirit, reminding us that when art is condensed into a movement with rules it will undoubtedly collapse over itself.

—ARTURO CONDE

Exit Through the Gift Shop is playing at local movie theaters. To schedule a visit to the 2010 *Rooftop Legends*, contact New Design High School, 212-475-4148, rooftoplegends2010.blogspot.com.



ARTWORK BY BANKSY in San Francisco (left) and Camden, U.K. (right). Photos courtesy of Banksy, banksy.co.uk.

TAKING ACTION

Continued from page 7

However, her transition into political activism has not come without a cost for Debbie and her family. Her passion for politics has "caused a lot of stress on our relationship," says Mahmoud. "There's always a cost to anything, and it's drawing from our reservoir."

Some of her friends worry she is on the "wrong political track." One friend, Debbie says, told her, "I'm worried for your children."

Debbie believes that this kind of reaction stems from the fact that the life she and her family have chosen to live is unconventional.

"We're looking at the world from a whole different perspective, and it's a harder way to live. Most people that I know would not want that — they would want a pretty status quo type of life," Debbie says.

While some of Debbie's friends avoid discussing Mideast politics with her, Debbie is eager to talk with friends who are interested in learning more about Israel's occupation of Palestine.

In 2009 Debbie took her brother to a talk by Israel-Palestine scholar Norman Finkelstein at the Brecht Forum, a political and social educational center on Manhattan's west side. Her brother, a Democrat and strong supporter of Barack Obama, said he was "shocked" by the realities of the situation in Gaza.

But for Debbie, knowledge is just the first step of many — she helped raise money for students participating in the Gaza Freedom March in 2009, and organized a protest outside a "Friends of the IDF" fundraiser at the Waldorf-Astoria earlier this spring.

With Jenna attending college in

the fall and Joel working as a doorman in the Upper East Side, Debbie plans to continue her part-time job, as well as her involvement in the Palestine solidarity movement.

"It is essential that the movement continue to grow. Hopefully, in this economic climate, Americans will decide that there are better uses for their money besides supporting unending wars that will fuel terrorism, not end it," Debbie says.

She used to think people could

not change anything in the world. And she still thinks that.

"Over a long time you can change [the world], but personally, me? Coming along and changing anything, it's unlikely," Debbie says.

"But I can have a part ... I want to change things badly, but that's not even the thing that motivates me any longer," she says. "It's just that I can no longer sit by and watch things happen and not speak out and at least be a voice shouting out there."



FLOTILLA FURY: Debbie Mardon hits the streets for a May 31 protest condemning Israel's killing of at least nine people who were part of a flotilla trying to break the blockade of Gaza. PHOTO: ELLEN DAVIDSON

reader comments *continued from page 2*

The United Nations estimates that developing countries together need \$86 billion a year simply to adapt to new challenges presented by climate change. Karah Woodward's article described how communities on the front lines of climate change are fighting back. As the leading carbon emitter, the United States has a responsibility. Climate change legislation must include funding for international adaptation. Adaptation funding will support communities in building resilience [in the face of] climate disasters. Just as the failure to cut emissions will cost us all, so will the failure to help those most vulnerable. These costs will be measured in lives lost to hunger, disasters and increased conflict.

—ISAAC EVANS-FRANTZ

SACRED BODY

Response to "Coloring the Abortion Debate" May 12:

Hats off to organizations like Desirée Flores' Ms. Foundation for Women for keeping traditionally under-represented women in the

dialogue and action on abortion issues. Women of color certainly are stakeholders in the dialogue, although it does appear, if we play the "numbers" game, that they are less involved, as women of color are having fewer abortions. However, we women of color understand the complexity of the issue and necessity for staying in the dialogue. I must say, though as a woman of color, our younger generation are having abortions for all the wrong reasons. Something has happened in the Black community that needs to be corrected. Our young women do not respect their bodies enough and the young men are not responsible or respectful enough. The Black community has to take more responsibility (and this includes the Black church) for putting an end to these unnecessary abortions. Abortion is not birth control and a woman's body is still sacred.

—RENEE M.

A MORE CRITICAL EYE

Response to "Showdown in the

Himalayas" May 12:

How frustrating. For the first time that I can remember, *The Indypendent* actually features a compelling photo on its cover and firsthand reportage from overseas — and it is Jed Brandt's embarrassingly uncritical lionization of Nepal's Maoists. Nowhere in his trumpeting of "people power" and "popular insurgency" is there any acknowledgement that the rebels were accused by Amnesty International of executions, torture and rape of non-combatants, as well as forced labor and the recruitment of child soldiers. (Lest Amnesty be dismissed as a mouthpiece of imperialist propaganda, it should be pointed out that they also accused the Nepalese government of all that and worse.) I'm still waiting for *The Indypendent* to live up to its name and its slogan of a "free paper for free people," instead of replicating the ethical and intellectual errors that have led to the American left's evisceration.

—BILL WEINBERG
EDITOR,
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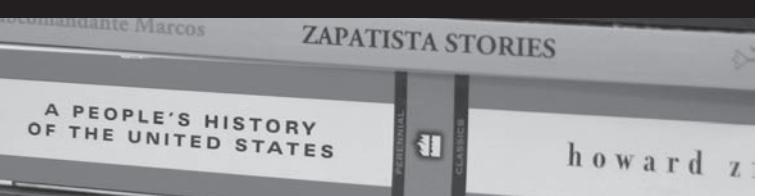
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MON JUNE 7, 7PM • FREE

READING: *LAST WORDS OF THE EXECUTED*. Journalist Robert K. Elder presents an oral history of American capital punishment. Join him for a reading of the testaments of the damned as heard from the gallows, the chair and the gurney.

THUR JUNE 10, 7PM • FREE

READING: *IN OUR CONTROL*. Join author and women's health activist Laura Eldridge for a reading and discussion of *In Our Control: The Complete Guide to Contraceptive Choices for Women*.

SUN JUNE 13, 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED DONATION

PRESENTATION: *THE WATER IS OUR DAMMIT*. Polluted water, mega-dams, privatization. Water is a seemingly ubiquitous and basic resource, but a crisis is bottling up. Emily Posner from Defending Water for Life presents art that confronts this nightmare.

FRI JUNE 18, 7PM • \$5 SUGGESTED DONATION

PRESENTATION: *QUEER COMIX*. Three Queer Comix Artists will discuss their work and the impacts they have been able to create through this form of popular media, in support of constructing counter-public communities.

MON JUNE 21, 7PM • FREE

READING: *LOVE, RACE, AND LIBERATION*. Join the editors and contributors of the ground-breaking multi-media project *Til the White Day is Done*, and its first creation: *Love, Race, and Liberation*, a curriculum guide on white privilege in America.

SAT JUNE 26, 7PM • FREE

READING: *SILENT STORM*. Author Ineke Van de Vijver reads from *Silent Storm: Bicycling for Freedom*, a novel based on real-life events with a touch of fiction.

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by Carol Dysinger

Drawing from nearly 300 hours of vérité footage shot between 2005 and 2008, CAMP VICTORY, AFGHANISTAN skillfully explores the reality of building a functioning Afghan military.

**Sat June 12 9:30; Sun June 13 7:30;
Thu June 17 4:00**

**THE UNRETURNED
(NY premiere)**

by Nathan Fisher

With an unflinching eye, powerfully candid dialogue and a touch of humor, THE UNRETURNED brings us into the lives of five Iraqis from diverse ethnicities and religions displaced by the ongoing war in their country.

Tues June 15 6:30; Wed June 16 9:00

**IRAN: VOICES OF THE UNHEARD
(US premiere)**

by Davoud Geramifard

The untold story of Iranian secularists through three fascinating characters—each from a distinct social, economic and educational background but all sharing a love for their motherland and a need for a country free from political repression and theocracy.

Sat June 12 4:30; Mon June 14 8:30; Tues June 15 4:00

